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DEPT FOR EUR/SCE:JERRY ISMAIL, SECDEF FOR OSD:WADE
POPOVICH, EUCOM FOR CRAIG CROXTON AND CIEG:RUSSEL HANKS

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SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR DOD EOD SUPPORT TO ALBANIA

Classified By: DCM Stephen Cristina for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) SUMMARY AND ACTION REQUEST - SEE ALSO PARAGRAPHS 7 AND ¶8. Post requests Department assistance in securing EOD support from the Department of Defense to assist the government of Albania in its efforts to eliminate 100,000 tons of destabilized unexploded conventional munitions (DUCMs) that pose a critical threat to the civilian population. This issue presents one of the greatest challenges to the national security of Albania; resolving it is one of the highest priorities of the USG in the region. The Government of Albania is motivated to resolve this problem, but lacks the expertise and the coordination necessary. As a first step, we support the Albanian CHOD's request for the one-year assignment of a US EOD officer to the Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) in Albania to act as an advisor to the Minister of Defense and as a focal point to coordinate the demilitarization efforts of the MoD and U.S. assistance. Because of the long-term nature of this problem, we would like to discuss additional assistance the DoD could offer through the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), EUCOM or OSD. End Summary.

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

¶2. (U) Excess stockpiles of destabilized unexploded conventional munitions (DUCMs) dispersed throughout the country represent the single most dangerous threat to national security in Albania. The previous communist government of Albania maintained a national security strategy of "defense in place" based on their policy of "every citizen a soldier." As a result, the government built up vast stockpiles of munitions that it dispersed among 40 depots scattered throughout the country. Most of these munitions are now over 30 years old and in an extremely dangerous state of decay, liable to self-explode. Furthermore, many of these depots are placed adjacent to or even inside civilian populations. In one instance, an elementary school abuts the depot. DTRA recently completed a survey of 21 of these depots (7 in October 2007 and 14 in July-August 2008). They assessed Albania as the worst hazardous munitions site in the world, both in terms of quantity and risk to civilian population.

¶3. (C) Although the March 15 tragedy at Gerdec involved many complicating factors, it proved an example of the real and present danger posed by Albania's DUCMs. DTRA assessed that it is not a question of "if" another explosion like Gerdec will happen, but "when." Their assessment is that it could likely occur within a year or sooner. Besides causing serious human loss, such an event could topple the

government.

¶4. (U) While the MoD estimates excess munitions at 100,000 tons, DTRA's report discovered ample discrepancies in the MoD inventories and speculated a much higher level of excess munitions.

EFFORTS TO DATE

¶5. (S) The USG and international donors have been involved in various demilitarization projects in Albania for several years. From 2002 to 2007, NATO (through NAMSA with Canada as lead nation and USG support among others) ran a 6 million euro small arms and light weapons project which installed an incinerator at the Mjekes explosives facility and destroyed 8,000 tons of mostly 7-14mm ammunitions and hand-grenades. The OSCE is currently overseeing a project to remove melange (rocket fuel) to Sweden. The USG has also run several projects, including the elimination of sea and landmines and most recently MANPADS (the last of 273 MANPADS were just destroyed in-country on October 23). The Department of State Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA) is currently providing USD 4.1 million for the clean-up of the Gerdec explosion (which is estimated to take anywhere up to three years). PM/WRA has also allotted USD 4.5 million for a project to demilitarize 82mm mortars. Although this project has been delayed by Albanian government bureaucracy, this effort will represent the first concrete step toward long-term stockpile reduction, to which PM/WRA has pledged USD 2 million per year for ten years.

¶6. (U) Until this year, though, the GOA has had no overarching demilitarization strategy. In spring of this year, ODC helped the MoD develop a National Demilitarization Plan which DefMin Oketa then presented to international donors on July 18. The plan has subsequently been revised to factor in the Gerdec tragedy and DTRA's recommendations. According to the Plan, the MoD hopes to eliminate the most dangerous category of excess munitions within three years and all other excess munitions by 2015. The plan establishes two industrial demil facilities at Mjekes and Polican. Each site can operate two separate demil lines simultaneously. The plan also calls for 5 detonation sites for the destruction of the most dangerous category of munitions. The plan is estimated to cost 4 billion lek (USD 380 million).

¶6. (U) Besides current US funding of the 82mm line and Gerdec, the Danish have offered 150,000 euro for demilitarization efforts. We have advised them to spend this money on four saws to upgrade Polican and Mjekes. The Dutch have also assigned an advisor to the MoD who is currently working in our ODC office. He is helping to coordinate a possible offer of training assistance from the Dutch. There are currently no other concrete international offers of assistance. This may be for lack of concrete suggestions.

¶7. (C) To date, actual demilitarization has not begun. The MoD has been hampered by internal bureaucratic wrangling, lack of internal coordination, and lack of expertise within the GOA. Polican and Mjekes were originally scheduled to begin work by the end of August. Neither have commenced work yet. Likewise, six detonation sites for the most dangerous munitions have just barely been approved. The MoD currently has 143 million lek (USD 13.6 million) of its FY2008 budget allotted for demil, but has spent almost none to date due to lack of forward movement and will lose it all at the end of the fiscal year. In an effort to alleviate these problems, Oketa has appointed a "demilitarization czar" to coordinate all the various GOA actors. However, the appointee - Fatmir Bozdo - is a civilian munitions engineer with no management experience, and has not been given authority to issue orders.

The ODC,s on-site contractor has stepped into this role in the absence of Bozdo's leadership, but is hampered by its status as a contractor.

ACTION REQUEST

¶7. (U) The Albanian CHOD has requested, and we support, the one-year assignment of a US EOD officer to the Ministry of Defense to act as an advisor to the Minister and a coordinator of demilitarization activities in Albania. First, as an EOD expert, he would be able to advise the Minister on the details of issue. Second, as an officer, he would command the respect necessary to work with the Albanian Armed Forces (AAF). We are aware of the scarcity of such officers in the active duty military and as an alternative, would suggest the assignment of a reservist. We can work with EUCOM to identify several reservists through Albania's State Partnership Program with the New Jersey National Guard.

¶8. (U) Given the long-term nature of the problem, we look forward to discussing with State, DoD and EUCOM additional, more long-term avenues of assistance to the GOA.
WITHERS